



The Seventh Commandment: A Shield

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"The keeping of the seventh commandment is such a vital *shield!* By lowering or losing that shield, the much-needed blessings of heaven are lost."



With you, my brothers and sisters, I have appreciated afresh the prophetic ministry of President Hinckley. I testify that he was foreordained a long, long time ago, and we are glad.

I share the reluctance Jacob expressed when he wrote of the problems of unchastity and infidelity, the breaching of what some number as the seventh commandment. Anxious because his audience had feelings "exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate," Jacob did not wish to "enlarge the wounds of those who [were] already

wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds" ([Jacob 2:7, 9](#)). Nevertheless, Jacob's words about the harsh consequences of immorality are diagnostic as well as poetic: "Many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds" ([Jacob 2:35](#)). Today we move among so many of the walking wounded, and the casualty list grows.

Hence, reassuring gospel givens could rightly be stressed, such as how individuals who truly repent, though their "sins be as scarlet," may become "as white as snow" ([Isa. 1:18](#)). But the rigors and the rich rewards of repentance are not the purposes of this talk. Nor is giving deserved praise to the many valiant youth and adults who practice chastity and fidelity—even when, for example, only a shrinking minority of American society now believes premarital relations are wrong. Commendations, therefore, to those who have *faith unto obedience* regarding the commandments, as well as salutations to those who have "*faith unto repentance*" ([Alma 34:15](#); emphasis added) when commandments are violated.

Clearly, unchastity and infidelity bring serious consequences such as the rippling, even haunting, effects of illegitimacy and fatherlessness, along with disease and the shredding of families. So many marriages hang by a thread or have already snapped. This quiet but deep crisis coexists with vexing international crises in our time, including war. Jesus spoke of latter days when there would be "distress of nations, with perplexity" and how all things would be in commotion ([Luke 21:25](#); see also [D&C 88:91](#); [45:26](#)).

Therefore, the keeping of the seventh commandment is such a vital *shield!* By lowering or losing that shield, the much-needed blessings of heaven are lost. No person or nation can prosper for long without those blessings.

Strange, in a time otherwise obsessed with entitlements, how little concern there is over our becoming entitled to the blessings of heaven. Instead, a declining belief by some in ultimate immortality has only intensified proximate immorality, "leading away many . . . telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof" ([Alma 30:18](#)). A Japanese thinker, looking at our pleasure-centered Western society, said, almost confrontingly:

"If there is nothing beyond death, then what is wrong with giving oneself wholly to pleasure in the short time one has left to live? The loss of faith in the 'other world' has saddled modern Western society with a fatal moral problem" (Takeshi Umehara, "The Civilization of the Forest: Ancient Japan Shows Postmodernism the Way," in *At Century's End*, ed. Nathan P. Gardels [1995], 190).

Therefore, being good citizens includes being good, such as in knowing the clear difference between lusting after a neighbor and loving one's neighbor! Matthew Arnold wisely observed that while "Nature cares nothing [for] chastity, . . . human nature . . . cares about it a great deal" (*Philistinism in England and America*, vol. 10 of *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super [1974], 160). To which I add: Divine nature cares infinitely more!

The influential tendencies of the natural man are unfriendly to the seventh commandment and these involve the self-damaging "carnal, sensual, [and] devilish" ([Mosiah 16:3](#); see also [Mosiah 3:19](#); [Moses 5:13](#)). If these three words sound too harsh, consider, brothers and sisters, the awful goal the adversary pursues: "that all men might be miserable like unto himself" ([2 Ne. 2:27](#)). Misery really does love company!

One of the best ways we can put "off the natural man" is to starve him ([Mosiah 3:19](#)). Weakened, he is more easily dislodged. Otherwise, he insists on getting his ticket punched at every stop on the temptation train. Sadly, corrective words do not usually help the natural man either, because lust chokes the word (see [Mark 4:19](#)).

Unfortunately, breaking the seventh commandment is made easier when clever sophists persuade some that whatsoever individuals do is really "no crime" ([Alma 30:17](#)). Yet some have eager ears, actually itching to hear something less than the truth, so they follow those who try to smooth the sharp-edged, inconvenient commandments (see [2 Tim. 4:3](#)). Nevertheless, the proverb remains true: "Whoso committeth adultery . . . lacketh understanding" ([Prov. 6:32](#)). The commandments are ignored by still others who are otherwise focused. Dostoevsky has one of his characters say, "The ages will pass, and humanity will proclaim by the lips of their sages that there is no crime, and therefore no sin; there is only hunger" (Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett [1952], 130–131).

The adversary has also artificially inflated the concept of privacy, further lubricating the slide away from individual accountability! After all, a few mouse clicks on a computer can take one, privately and quickly, into enemy territory without having to go through passport control, the only remaining restraint then being the checkpoint of dulled conscience.

But God does not have two sets of Ten Commandments, one indoor and another outdoor! Nor are there two approved roads to repentance. True, a weekend of regret may produce some "sorrowing of the damned," but not the "mighty change" which only godly sorrow produces ([Morm. 2:13](#); [Mosiah 5:2](#); [2 Cor. 7:10](#); see also [Alma 5:13–14](#)).

Yes, we mortals are still free to choose. Yes, a war was even fought in heaven to preserve our moral agency. Yet down here, the great gift of agency is often surrendered without so much as a mild whimper!

There are so many ways to keep the shielding seventh commandment firmly in place. Instructively,

for instance, David's fall, at least in part, was facilitated because he was not where duty lay: "It came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, . . . David tarried still at Jerusalem" ([2 Sam. 11:1](#)). Then, as you know, came the lustful view from the roof and all the sadness that followed. Implicit, therefore, in the instruction "Stand ye in holy places" is to avoid indulgent tarrying ([D&C 87:8](#); see also [Matt. 24:15](#)).

Those who live "after the manner of happiness" ([2 Ne. 5:27](#)) also wisely develop protective, spiritual manners. These manners are reflected in their proper dress, language, humor, and music, thereby sending the signal of determined discipleship (see [Prov. 23:7](#)).

Moreover, the avoidance of later difficulty includes not carrying into a marriage unrepented-of sins, causing spouses to start off "unequally yoked together" ([2 Cor. 6:14](#)). Likewise, husbands and wives can deliberately avoid drifting apart by refusing to relax their loyalties and by not being caught in the strong currents leading to the waterfalls. Equally to be avoided is the stagnant swamp of self-pity. Therein, individuals can easily rationalize any remaining sense of accountability by pushing aside the restraints of both conscience and covenants, seeking to "justify [themselves] before men" for that which is an "abomination [before] God" ([Luke 16:15](#)).

Seeing through sensuality's deceptive spin is another vital preventive. For instance, some of those who flout the seventh commandment by their immoral lifestyles are like Cain's declaring, "I am free" ([Moses 5:33](#)), after breaking the sixth commandment by slaying Abel. Such erroneous thinking about freedom evokes Peter's warning words: "Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" ([2 Pet. 2:19](#); see also [2 Ne. 2:26-30](#)). True, strident souls may even fake laughter amid bondage and sin, but another proverb applies: "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness" ([Prov. 14:13](#)).

In an age rightly concerned with truth in advertising, how intellectually insulting are certain deceptive labels: *Ecstasy* should read *misery*; *Rave* is really a *mournful mutter* emanating from sensuality gone amok. For instance, some participants foolishly think a little lewd dancing is harmless. These individuals do "not sin ignorantly" ([3 Ne. 6:18](#)). By imitating and by underestimating the enemy, they end up compromising themselves, while confusing and disappointing their friends!

Ever wonder why the sensual scene so often features flashing but fading lights? Or why all the reinforcing glitz? Or why all the loudness masquerading as music? Because, fearful of the dawn, evil cannot stand the steady scrutiny of bright truth, nor can it endure the quiet reflections of soul-searching!

Thus the drumbeat of desensitization deadens the tastebuds of the soul by responding *illegitimately* to the *legitimate* need for belonging and for love, as predators and victims sadly become "past feeling" ([1 Ne. 17:45](#); [Eph. 4:19](#); [Moro. 9:20](#)).

Henry Fairlie wrote of how "the lustful person will usually be found to have a terrible hollowness at the center of his life" (Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* [1978], 187). Still, some naive youth talk about "filling their canteens," which will be empty except for the residual sand and gravel of toxic memories. Fairlie also wrote, "Lust is not interested in its partners, but only in the gratification of its own craving. . . . Lust dies at the next dawn, and when it returns in the evening, to search where it may, it is with its own past erased" (*The Seven Deadly Sins Today*, 175).

However costumed or made up, lust is no substitute for love; actually, brothers and sisters, it chokes out the development of real love, causing "the love of many [to] wax cold" ([Matt. 24:12](#)). No wonder we are told to "bridle all [our] passions, that [we] may be filled with love" ([Alma 38:12](#)). Otherwise, oozing passions fill the available soul space, and double occupancy is not possible.

Previously, society has often had helpful, though subtle, balancing and restraining mechanisms—including families, and churches, and schools—to checkrein excessive individual behavior. But too often some of these mechanisms are either missing, malfunctioning, or equivocating.

Moreover, the foregoing trends are further accelerated by the fashionable nonjudgmentalism which excuses whatever wrong individuals do—as long as they do anything else commendable. After all, didn't Mussolini make the trains run on time? Violators of the seventh commandment may still make useful contributions, but they pay a hidden, personal cost (see [Alma 28:13](#)). Of King Morianton we read, "He did [deal justly with his] people, but not [with] himself because of his many whoredoms" ([Ether 10:11](#)). Apparently a fair, no-respecter-of-persons leader, Morianton did not respect himself! His self-inflicted wounds were masked by the outward ornamentation of riches and buildings (see [Ether 10:12](#)).

So sobering is all of the foregoing that what follows needs to be said, and I do not hesitate to say it. The revelations tell us that commensurate with their own sins, unrepentant sinners must suffer even as [Jesus] did for ours, as they one day personally experience the full justice of God (see [D&C 19:16–18](#)). Additionally, however, those who in various ways persistently foster and intensify this often drug-drenched drama of immorality—whether as promoters, enablers, facilitators, or profiteers—will also then face and then feel all the misery they have caused countless others!

Finally, brothers and sisters, in certain times and circumstances, discipleship requires us to be willing to stand alone! Our willingness to do so, here and now, is consistent with Christ's kneeling alone, there and then, in Gethsemane. In the final atoning process, "none were with [Him]" ([D&C 133:50](#); see also [Matt. 26:38–45](#)).

As we take our stand, the faithful will not be alone, however. Of necessity, the angel who stood by Christ in Gethsemane to strengthen Him left Him (see [Luke 22:43](#)). If we hold aloft the shield of faith in God and faith in His commandments, His angels will be "round about [us], to bear [us] up" and "have charge over [us]" ([D&C 84:88](#); [109:22](#)). Of this promise, I testify. And now, therefore, in terms of the weather in our souls, brothers and sisters, I testify that we set the dial. We so determine the degree of our happiness in this and the next world. I likewise testify that our compliance with God's commandments, including the seventh, invites God to place His hand on ours as we set the dial. It is the hand of Him who desires to give us all that He hath (see [D&C 84:38](#)). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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